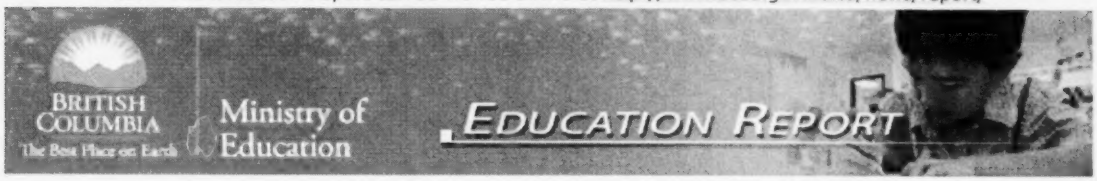
Note: The Education Report can be viewed online at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/news/report/



Issue No. 52

In The News

Almost $100M for Seismically Safer Chilliwack Schools

$70M in Seismic Renovations for North Vancouver Schools

$2.4 Million for Drinkwater Elementary Seismic Upgrade

Houston Strongstart BC Centre Open for Preschoolers

David Hoy Strongstart BC Centre Open for Preschoolers

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Links

- Media Room
- StrongStart BC
- LearnNow BC
- School Choices
- Healthy Schools
- ReadNow BC
- School District Visits

Message from Minister Shirley Bond

Merry Christmas!

Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister of Education

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We have many accomplishments this year, including the expansion of our StrongStart BC centres, promotion of healthier living through daily physical activity, the removal of junk food in schools and the advancement of our seismic mitigation plan. I know students, teachers and staff will enjoy the two week break and will be ready to build on 2008's accomplishments in 2009.

Seismic Mitigation Program

Nothing is more important than the safety of British Columbia's students. That's why this government has made a 15-year commitment to seismically upgrade our schools. In fact, we are the first-ever government in British Columbia to undertake a comprehensive school seismic upgrading program.

The Auditor General recently completed a comprehensive report on the Province's School Seismic Mitigation Program. We have accepted his recommendations and have already acted on a number of them, including:

- Requesting that school districts include seismic upgrades in their long-term capital planning;
- Providing additional funding to help districts manage their projects; and
- Integrating the Seismic Mitigation Program into our annual budgeting process.

To date, 89 seismic upgrade projects are complete, under construction or proceeding to construction. We have spent about $400 million, and we will be providing more support to school districts to identify and begin work on seismic projects.

We understand that people want the School Seismic Mitigation Program to move more quickly, and so do we. We are three years into our 15-year Seismic Mitigation Plan, and have made significant progress in the face of the double-digit escalation in construction costs.

By the end of 2008-09, this government will have committed more than $3.1 billion in school capital and maintenance projects across British Columbia. This investment comes at a time when enrolment has declined by about 50,000 students.

We will continue to work closely with boards to ensure seismic projects are identified, prioritized and effectively completed in B.C. communities, so that our children and staff are safer in their schools.

Third Annual Teacher's Congress

Education Minister Shirley Bond met with teachers from public, independent and band schools from across the province to exchange ideas on education and share best practices at the 3rd Annual Teachers' Congress in Vancouver, Nov. 28, 2008. Read more.

HOT TOPIC

As Minister of Education, I believe it is important for every parent to know how well their child is performing in school. And as Minister of Education, I believe the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is one way to provide that information to parents.

I was extremely disappointed to learn that the BC Teachers' Federation recently passed a resolution calling for a boycott of the Foundation Skills Assessment. These publicly reported grade 4 and 7 assessments provide parents, teachers, and principals with valuable information on how every student is performing in reading, writing, and math. The FSA helps to ensure students are meeting expectations for their grade level.

The BCTF's call for a random sampling of students would mean that not every parent would receive critical information about their child's progress. Furthermore, random sampling for FSA was already explored and rejected by the former government because it was less effective. Through the FSA we are able to look specifically at achievement results for Aboriginal students, students with special needs, boys, girls and English as a Second Language students – a random sampling simply does not provide this level of detail.

The FSA is responsible, effective and supports student success. Experts, including B.C.'s own Representative for Children and Youth, parents' organizations, and First Nations have all said they find this to be a useful and necessary tool. The ministry remains committed to ensuring that all B.C. parents and caregivers continue to receive information about their child's progress through this assessment.

Something as precious to our families as our children's education should not become a political game. It is time for the teachers' union to put

students' needs first and to work with government to support individual student learning.

I encourage you to learn more about the Foundation Skills Assessment at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/info/.

Tips for a Greener Holiday Season

1. Support the local economy and help reduce long distance transportation costs by buying a B.C.-grown Christmas tree and buying gifts at local crafts fairs.
2. Buy a potted tree that can be replanted outdoors in the spring. If you are unable to replant your Christmas tree, return it to a composting facility at the end of the season.
3. If you put up Christmas lights, choose energy-efficient LED lights and turn them off during the day. While a 50-bulb incandescent strand of Christmas lights uses 250 watts, an equivalent 70-bulb LED strand uses only three watts. Turn the lights off at night.
4. When shopping for gifts and groceries, bring along a canvas bag to carry your purchases and try to choose items that have little or no packaging.
5. Wrap gifts in recyclable wrapping paper or use reusable gift bags.
6. If you're hosting or organizing a holiday party, use cloth napkins and glass plates. Avoid using disposable napkins, plates and cutlery.
7. After the holidays, reuse gift boxes, packaging and wrapping paper when possible, and recycle what cannot be reused – contact your local government to find out what items are acceptable in your blue box program.